

Veterans Deserve a Congress

Worthy of Their Sacrifice

By Congressman Jerry Moran

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Last Monday, thousands gathered at cemeteries, memorials, and civic centers across America to honor the memory of those who made the ultimate sacrifice to defend our country and way of life.

America has come a long way in our treatment of the warriors that protect our freedoms. During the Vietnam War, service members returning from the front lines were greeted by hostility; today, they are cheered and welcomed home with open arms. Tragically, Washington D.C. is far behind the times. This Congress must make good on the promises made to those who serve our country in the military.

A little over a million service members who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan have become eligible for Veteran's Administration (VA) health care. The first thing this Congress can do for

these new veterans is pass a budget for Fiscal Year 2011 that is fiscally prudent and doesn't put us further into debt.

One of the basic responsibilities of Congress is to produce an annual budget. Yet, almost halfway through this year, the leadership in the House of Representatives has refused to present a budget to the American people for the first time since 1974. Congress desperately needs a fiscally responsible budget to guide its spending. Last week, the national debt passed the \$13 trillion mark. From bailouts to so-called stimulus bills, this Administration's deficit spending is simply unsustainable. This looming fiscal disaster threatens the ability to make good on the commitment our government made to veterans.

Kansas families and businesses are struggling to balance their budgets and live within their means; Congress must do the same. It is past time for our government to live within its means and cut runaway spending. We need to examine every department and every program within the Federal government and make the hard choices necessary so that we will have the resources needed to fund the fundamental role of the federal government: to keep our country secure and take care of those who make these sacrifices. This process should begin with a Congressional budget.

This is only a small step towards what Washington must do to better serve our veterans. The greatest concern I hear from Kansas veterans is the lengthy delay in processing disability compensation claims. The number of claims will only increase as more troops return back home. As a member of the House Veteran's Affairs Committee, I have worked hard with my colleagues from both sides of the aisle to address the antiquated and inefficient claims system the VA uses which leave thousands of frustrated veterans waiting for help. We have made some progress in fixings these problems, but much more work remains.

Our country must also help better prepare soldiers for life after they depart the service of their country. Veterans coming home from Iraq and Afghanistan are having a difficult time finding employment. According to a recent report by the Department of Labor, 10.2 percent of veterans that served in Iraq and Afghanistan are unemployed. That number shoots up to over 20 percent for veterans between 18 and 24. The Congress should increase job training programs and expand incentives for private businesses that hire veterans.

The influx of veterans into the system will continue to grow in the coming years. Congress must immediately get its fiscal house in order so that we have the resources to address the challenges the VA system faces. These brave men and women deserve a government worthy of their sacrifice. To honor their sacrifice our nation must do everything in our power to make sure that when the guns finally do go silent, that we are in the best position possible to keep our commitments.